

ORTHOPTERA AROUND BIRMINGHAM

JOHN PAUL

*104 Southfield Park, Bartlemas Close, Oxford OX4 2BA.**(Concluded from page 174)*

List of Selected Sites

A. Urban Sites

1. Snowhill Station (SP0687): This locality, for many years the site of a derelict railway station, is remarkable for being at the heart of Birmingham. Until redevelopment of the site started in the mid-1980s, there were extensive areas of gravel, rubble and clinker, with patches of vegetation and a few bushes. *Chorthippus brunneus* was abundant here at least until 1984, when redevelopment of the site prevented access. Snowhill was popular with Birmingham lepidopterists in the early 1980s because of its strong population of the Common Blue Butterfly, *Polyommatus icarus*. At the time of writing (1990), the site is once again occupied by a functional railway station but it is possible that *C. brunneus* still survives there.

2. Canal banks in the Smethwick area: Birmingham has many miles of canals whose overgrown banks, cuttings and towpaths provide ideal habitat for *Chorthippus brunneus*, which often occurs in large numbers. Most of my collecting was done at Winson Green, near Dudley Road Hospital (SP0488), where there are high south-west-facing banks with rough grassland. As a guest on a Fern Society barge trip in 1984, from Gas Street to Sandwell, I was shown patches of vegetation in a canal cutting, about one mile west of Winson Green which are believed to be vestiges of the once extensive Birmingham Heath, which existed before the industrial revolution. There are a few clumps of ling, cowberry and lemon-scented fern. Unfortunately no heathland Orthoptera were found.

3. Turner's Hill (SO9688) and Darby's Hill (SO/96-89-): These dolerite hills are a conspicuous feature of the West Midlands landscape. They are quarried and built upon, but have large open areas with sparse vegetation. *C. brunneus* occurs in large numbers but I have not detected other species.

4. Wren's Nest Hill (SO9391): A much quarried lump of Silurian limestone, world-famous for its fossils. There are areas of limestone grassland, scree and cliffs. *C. brunneus* is the only species I have recorded, but my searches for Orthoptera at this site have not been extensive.

5. The Vale (SP0584), Edgbaston: The location of Birmingham University's Halls of Residence. There is a south-facing grassy slope with *C. brunneus* and scanty *Omocestus viridulus*.

B. Sites with semi-natural vegetation on the periphery of the West Midlands conurbation

1. Sutton Park (SP0919): This is without doubt the premier Orthoptera site in the county of West Midlands. There are large areas of deciduous woodland, rough grassland, heath, bog and lakes. The park is surrounded by built-up areas. Butterflies include the Green Hairstreak and Holly Blue, which is often abundant. I have seen Common Butterwort near Bracebridge Pool. Four species of grasshopper are common in open areas: *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus*, *C. brunneus* and *M. maculatus*.

2. Pelsall Common: The 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map labels two places as Pelsall Common: the smaller, between Pelsall and Heath End (SK022027) is managed as parkland, with mown turf and a lake, but there are areas of mown heather. On my single visit to the site, I found *C. brunneus*, but other species may occur.

North of Pelsall, west of the B4154 road and straddling the Wyrley and Essington Canal is a better Pelsall Common with large expanses of heather and marshland, with *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus* and *M. maculatus*.

3. Wyrley Common (SK0206): Derelict spoil heaps, overgrown with birch, grassland and heather. Despite its uninviting appearance, four grasshoppers occur: *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus*, *C. brunneus* and *M. maculatus*.

4. Chasewater (SK04070): West of the reservoir is a superb fragment of moorland with much heather and a site for sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia*, within the West Midlands. *Chorthippus brunneus* and *M. maculatus* are present there, as well as on a heathy canal bank, east of the minor road (SK047069).

5. Rubery Hill: A quarried and visually unattractive hill, but with some patches of heathland and three grasshoppers: *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus*, *M. maculatus*.

6. Lickey Hills (SO9975; SO0076), Coften Hill (SP0074): Ancient quartzite hills, treed with pine and with open areas of bilberry, grassland and ling. Despite numerous visits I have found only *C. brunneus*.

8. Beacon Hill (SO9876): A grassy slope, overlooking Birmingham. *Chorthippus brunneus* and *O. viridulus* present.

9. Solihull, Riverside Drive (SP165789): From a patch of damp ground with *Carex* spp. and clumps of ling, isolated by newly constructed roads and buildings. J.W. Lewis reported *C. albomarginatus* in 1984. I was unable to find this species when I went there the following year (in less than ideal conditions) but did find *O. viridulus* and *C. brunneus*.

10. Coleshill Bog: A remarkable place, with birch woods, heather, sphagnum bog and a lake, surrounded by major roads: M6, M42, A446(T) and their sliproads. There are numerous dragonflies, including: *Lestes*

sponsa, *Enallagma cyathiferum*, *Aeshna cyanea*, *Libellula depressa*, *L. quadrimaculata* and *Sympetrum striolatum*. On one occasion I caught a mature male *S. danae*. Orthoptera by the bog itself have disappointed me, *C. brunneus* being the only species I have found west of the A446(T). However, east of the A446(T) the acid ground continues and at a heathy woodland border (SP203863) are *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus* and *C. brunneus*.

11. Bickenhill Plantation (SP1884): Jeremy Roads collected a specimen of *Metrioptera brachyptera* from long grass at this site on 4.ix.1986. The specimen is in Warwick Museum. Pamela Copson kindly sent me a colour slide of the insect which leaves no doubt as to its identity.

In May 1990 two nymphs were found: one was reared. This unusual locality for *M. brachyptera*, being devoid of heather, is due for development.

C. Heaths and Moors

1. Wixall Moss (SJ43): A magnificent expanse of peat moor, continuous with Fenn's Moss in Wales. It has long been a favourite hunting ground of Birmingham entomologists and is of national importance for its exceptional fauna. The Large Heath butterfly is common most years. The nationally rare dragonfly *Leucorrhinia dubia* is sometimes abundant: on 6.vii.1986 I collected 50 exuviae in less than half an hour.

Orthoptera found are: *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus*, *M. maculatus*, *T. undulata* and the local *M. brachyptera*. All of them abound at Whixall.

2. Prees Heath (SJ53): Birmingham entomologists visit this locality for the Silver-studded Blue butterfly, which somehow survives on tiny fragments of sandy heathland in the company of *M. maculatus*.

3. Cramer Gutter (SO6479): A small area of bog associated with a stream, surrounded by dry, sandy heathland. A very rich locality. Dragonflies include *Cordulegaster boltonii* and *Orthetrum coerulescens*. Orthoptera are of high quality with *M. brachyptera*, *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus*, *M. maculatus* and *T. undulata*. I have never found *C. brunneus* at Cramer Gutter, in contrast to sites in Birmingham where it is usually the only grasshopper to be found.;

4. Highgate Common (SO8389) and Forest Covert (SO839): Deciduous woodland and heathland with pools. *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus* and *M. maculatus* are all common. Mr R. Hill has found *M. brachyptera* in one small damp area of the common, the colony having been discovered by Mr A. Moffet (Hill, pers. com., 1990).

5. Kinver Edge (SO8383): Deciduous woodland and dry heath. *C. brunneus*, *M. maculatus*.

6. Hartlebury Common (SO8270; 8271): Dry sandy heathland. *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus*, *M. maculatus*.

7. Kidderminster Rifle Range (SO8074; 8174; 8175): Dry sandy heathland. *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus*, *M. maculatus*.

8. Alverley Waste Heap (SO7583): Derelict coal mining land by the River

Severn but visually and entomologically attractive. *T. undulata*, *C. brunneus*, *M. maculatus*. Mr R. Kemp has found *M. thalassinum* nearby.

9. Cannock Chase: Extensive area of dry heathland and mixed woodland with valley bogs. Most sites are rich in Orthoptera, but Oldacre Valley (SJ9718) and Penkridge Bank (SK0017) are among the best with: *M. brachyptera*, *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus*, *M. maculatus*.

D. Woodland

1. Wyre Forest (SO77): An outstanding entomological site of national importance. Three grasshoppers are common: *O. viridulus*, *C. brunneus*, *T. undulata* is present on the disused railway track and at Sturt Common. Three bush-crickets may be seen: *M. thalassinum*, *P. griseoptera* (on the banks of the River Severn near the mouth of Dowles Brook and near Ribbesford Woods) and *L. punctatissima* (Fincher, 1964).

2. Chaddesley Woods complex (SO97): *M. thalassinum* is locally common. Grassland in Randan Wood has *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus*, *C. brunneus*. Fincher (1953) records *T. undulata* from Randan Wood.

3. Monk Wood (SO8060): Of interest to lepidopterists because of its moths and the Wood White butterfly. Three bush-crickets: *M. thalassinum*, *P. griseoptera*, *L. punctatissima* and two groundhoppers: *T. subulata* and *T. undulata*.

4. Trench Wood (SO9258): Another lepidopterist's wood but with: *M. thalassinum*, *P. griseoptera*, *T. undulata*, *C. parallelus*, *C. brunneus*.

E. Grassland

1. Bredon Hill: On my single visit I found *O. viridulus*, *C. parallelus* and *C. brunneus*, but it is very likely that more species occur on this outlier of the Cotswolds.

2. Broadway Hill: An enclave of Worcestershire in the generally Orthoptera-rich Cotswolds. I have seen *C. parallelus* and *C. brunneus* and it is probable that several more species occur.

3. Ufton Fields, Warwickshire: Liassic limestone grassland with ponds. A rich limestone grassland with Man and Bee Orchids. *T. subulata*, *C. albomarginatus*, *C. brunneus*.

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The Magpie Moth (*Abraxas grossulariata* L.) in North Cheshire (v.c.58)

I was very interested in B.K. West's article (*Ent. Rec.* **103**: 89-92). In the 1950s and 1960s any currant or gooseberry bush in the Sale/Altrincham area, to the south of Manchester, could be guaranteed to provide a plentiful supply of larvae of this species. I used to breed large numbers every year, especially from the *Ribes* in my own garden and the allotments across the road.

On 22.x.1967 I came across a vast number of *grossulariata* larvae behind Dunham Park, settling down for hibernation on a small oak tree, on which at that time they appeared to have been feeding. I returned to the site on 17.v.1968 to find the larvae, nearly fully grown, feeding on a hedge of sloe bushes underneath the oak. I brought about five hundred of them home and reared virtually 100% through to moths, among which were a handful of interesting vars, including a few approximating to *hazeleighensis* Rayn. and one *paucisignata* Lempke. Taking this many appeared to have made very little effect on the colony. The remaining caterpillars completely stripped the sloe bushes.

Returning in 1969, I found the colony still present, but in greatly reduced numbers. The following year, there were none. Neither have there ever